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WHAT IS GREAT BRITAIN DOING?

AN AMERICAN VIEW.

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What is Great Britain Doing?

What has the British Empire done in the War? All the world knows what the German forces have done. The work of the Russian Empire is equally palpable. The world also is in no manner of doubt as to the brilliant and sustained heroism of the French nation. It regards, and justly, the recovery of France after the first reverses as one of the most signal moral triumphs recorded in history.

In comparison with these resounding achievements, what has the British Empire to show for its great wealth, its wide territories and teeming population? The British Fleet is the first in the world in point of size and reputation, yet it has bombarded no German town, landed no force on German soil, has brought on no general engagement.

The British Army has fought well and gallantly; but the question is not whether it has done well, but whether it is doing enough. Do its achieve-

ments, measured by the scale of the present war, constitute a contribution to the Allied cause proportionate to the strength of so great an Empire ?

Such questions as these are frequently heard. The " failure " of the British nation in the war is a subject of widespread comment and criticism. Competent observers have declared that the country's efforts have been inconsiderable compared to the enormous sacrifices of France, while the most superficial critics assume a knowing air when they speak of British inertia and incompetence. Germany's military achievements have startled the world, France's devotion has won universal applause, but there is a popular impression that Great Britain is a laggard and has accomplished little.

As a fact, the first paragraphs in this article are quoted word for word from an English writer. Britons are well aware of the world's unfavourable judgment upon the Empire, and are their own most relentless critics.

The subject is well worth study, particularly by Americans. National defence is an overshadowing issue in the United States, and its citizens might profitably examine this practical

illustration of the problems that confront a nation at war. We purpose to discuss the record quite impartially, without raising any questions of right or wrong, of responsibility for the war or the conflicting national aims in prosecuting it.

As a matter of plain fact, has Great Britain contributed insignificantly to the cause of the Allies? Has she shown indifference and selfishness, as well as lack of successful military strategy? Has she refused or failed to assume her just share of the burden?

The first thing to consider is that she entered the war unprepared. Aside from the inveterate national prejudice against a large military establishment, there had always been agreement that in the event of a European war her sea power would be her sufficient weapon. She had, therefore, neither an army of a size commensurate with the need, nor the means of equipping and feeding it.

The terrific onslaught of the Germans created overnight problems of stupendous extent and complexity. Great Britain was called upon not only to hold the sea for herself and her Allies, but to enlist, train and arm a vast land force; to defend possessions in every quarter of the globe, while attacking those of her enemies;

to finance the operations of the Empire and of half a dozen nations besides, and, above all, to revolutionize her industries so as to provide inexhaustible supplies of munitions and other war materials, for she lacked not only arms, but the means of making them. How has she met these demands?

Her most obvious accomplishment has been to establish control of the ocean. There are, experts find, seven functions which a fleet can perform. It may drive the enemy's commerce from the sea; protect its own commerce; render the enemy's fleet impotent; prevent the transfer of enemy troops by sea, either for attack or defence; transport its own troops and supplies at will, and, in certain circumstances, assist their operations.

Had it not been for British sea power the German Navy, superior to that of France, would have bombarded French coast towns, scattered the French Fleet, intercepted French commerce and prevented the transport of the Republic's troops from Africa. While the British Fleet has lost more capital ships than the enemy, it could afford to do so, and meanwhile it has destroyed scores of enemy war vessels, besides utterly extinguishing Germany's foreign trade, except in the Baltic.

It has kept both the British and French coasts free from serious attack. It has safeguarded the transport of immense forces from India, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to Europe, and of expeditions to Egypt and the Dardanelles. During the first year of the conflict no fewer than 2,500,000 troops were transferred to and from the various theatres of war without a casualty, together with 2,500,000 tons of supplies.

It has been the British Fleet that has enabled Britain and France to draw war supplies from all parts of the world, without which they would be helpless. "Loss of the command of the sea by England," said a French writer, "would involve more than her own capitulation; France and Italy would soon be at the mercy of their adversaries." Likewise, the Fleet has protected the overseas commerce of both countries, so that they have not only had abundant supplies, but have been enabled to continue their foreign trade.

Through lack of foresight, British sea power suffered one reverse in the loss of Craddock's squadron off the coast of Chile, but in three other engagements—in the Bight of Heligoland, off the Falkland Islands and on the Dogger Bank—it maintained decisive superiority.

With such a clear preponderance of strength, it is sometimes asked, why has not the British Fleet sought out the German naval forces and destroyed them? "The spirit of Drake and Nelson is dead," the Germans have tauntingly cried. The answer is, that the function of a fleet is to command the seas in exactly the manner we have outlined. So long as it can do that without forcing a general engagement, with the risk of heavy losses, undertaking the offensive for its own sake would be mere blustering folly. As it is, the German Fleet has been held in powerless seclusion and the seas kept free for the Allies' use.

But, even granting that the British Fleet has been successful, critics say, what about the failure of the Empire on land? Where is the British Army? Why is it holding only forty miles of trenches, while the French hold more than four hundred?

We have already spoken of Britain's military unpreparedness. When the war began her army consisted of only 233,000 men, with 203,000 reserves and a militia force—for home defence only—of 263,000. It had been the understanding that in the event of German aggression Russia and France would bear the brunt of the land fighting; France asked for a British force of 150,000, and got them promptly.

Such colossal miscalculation looks almost criminal now. But the marvel is not that the British held so little of the line in the beginning as that they actually created a real continental army during the war. Within six months they added 1,000,000 men to their forces; within a year the number under training was 3,000,000; and a few days ago the Premier announced that no fewer than 5,000,000 had been enlisted for the Army and Navy, every one a volunteer.

There has been no achievement like this in history. During the American Civil War the Federal Force aggregated fewer than 3,000,000, and this total was not reached without drafts and vast expenditure for bounties. The insistent campaign for compulsion, now approaching success, has created an ugly impression of national indifference; but the fact is that more than 80 per cent. of the available men have enlisted voluntarily, and only a few hundred thousand will be forced into the ranks.

There remains, however, the fact that for many months the British held only two-score miles of trenches, and this has unquestionably occasioned criticism in France. Yet the world-wide extent of the British operations should be considered. The Empire has not only assumed responsibility for control of the sea, but

has had forces aggregating hundreds of thousands of men in Belgium and Flanders, at the Dardanelles and in the Balkans, in Egypt and Arabia, in China and the Islands of the Pacific, in South-western, Eastern and Western Africa, in Persia and Mesopotamia. Consider what any one of these campaigns would mean to the United States, for example, whose resources are strained by a bit of police work in neighbouring territory !

But, regardless of this, the reproach is no longer true. There are now 1,500,000 British troops in France—ten times the number originally demanded—and they are holding 150 miles of the line. With the exception of about twenty miles manned by the Belgians, the trenches from the North Sea to Soissons, including the most vital part of the western defence, are guarded exclusively by the British.

No less striking than the creation of a vast army has been the tremendous accomplishment of organizing the country's industries for war. Lacking workshops, machinery and adequate supplies of raw material in the beginning, Great Britain has become the chief reliance of her Allies for munitions. And there is, in addition, the colossal task of financing the war. Belgium, France, Russia, Servia and other nations

in the Alliance have received no less than $2,000,000,000 from Great Britain. The Empire at this time is spending $25,000,000 a day—more than seven times the cost of the American Civil War. Money is as vital a weapon as artillery, and in this item alone the British contribution is surely notable.

After all, a fairly effective answer to the question: What has Britain done? would be a counter-query: What would have been the course of the war if she had not joined? Obviously, the result would have been the annihilation, not only of Belgium, but of France; for without the support of British sea power, British wealth and even British soldiers, Paris and the Channel coast of France would have been in German possession within a few weeks and Russia would have been reduced to impotence.

There are just criticisms that can be made of Great Britain's policies and methods; her diplomacy in the war has been lamentable; she has made ghastly failures at Gallipoli, in the Balkans and in Mesopotamia; her people have been slow to devote all their energies to the great task, and her military strategists have revealed appalling conceit and incompetence.

But Americans who recall the blunders and scandals of the little war with Spain, and who

have before their eyes the present conditions in Mexico, should hesitate to assume an air of superiority. Great Britain's contribution to the cause of the Allies, far from being negligible, has been decisive, is steadily increasing, and, in the end, we believe, will be the controlling factor.

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